

## WHAT REMEDIAL READING TEACHERS WANT (A Manifesto) from Pennington Publishing Blog

Remedial reading (reading intervention) teachers of upper elementary, middle school, high school, and adult students all share the same instructional goal: help their students become fluent readers who understand what they read. Teachers want to achieve this goal in the shortest amount of instructional time. The longer poor readers have to wait to “catch up” to grade level reading, the further they fall behind in their overall education. Research shows that the older the poor reader gets, the less likely is that reader to catch up to reading at grade level. For example, only one-in-six middle school readers who are two grades behind in their reading ever catch up to grade level reading.

Teachers all understand that remedial reading students may all be in the same boat, in terms of their inability to read well, but that they are each in that boat for different reasons. If teachers treat the students as if they all are in the boat for the same reasons, both teacher and students will fail to achieve their goals. So, the instructional design and resources of a successful remedial reading program must allow teachers to differentiate instruction for the diverse needs of their students. Teachers know that one-size-fits all program will not work for these learners. In fact, a canned program can be counterproductive.

Education is always reductive. If we do one thing, we can't do another. Resources (both monetary and human), time, structural considerations, and commitment are all scarcities. If a remedial reader does not directly benefit from a program that specifically addresses why he or she is in the boat, it would be better to stay out of the boat and benefit from other resources. For example, a seventh grade student who is removed from an English-language arts class for remedial reading will probably lose the content of reading two novels, learning grade level grammar and vocabulary, missing the speech and poetry units...you get the idea. Not to mention, the possibility of losing social science or science instruction if placed in a remedial reading class...Both content and reading strategies are critical for reading development.

So, let's get specific about how teachers want to teach a remedial reading program with a Remedial Reading Teacher's Manifesto.

1. Teachers want diagnostic assessments that will pinpoint individual reading strengths and deficiencies. But, they don't want assessments that will eat up excessive amounts of instructional time or cause mounds of paperwork.
2. Teachers want teaching resources that specifically target the reading deficits indicated by the diagnostic assessments. Teachers don't want to waste time by starting each learner from “scratch” with hours of repetitive practice. Teachers don't want to teach what students already know.
3. Teachers want program resources that will enable them to establish a clear game plan, but also ones which will allow them to deviate from that plan, according to the needs of their students. Teachers want to be able to integrate writing, grammar, and spelling instruction and include real reading in their remedial reading programs.
4. Teachers want resources that won't assume that they are reading specialists. However, they don't want resources that treat them like script-reading robots. Teachers are fast learners.

5. Teachers want resources that they can grab and use, not resources that require lots of advance preparation. Teachers want to do a great job with their students and still maintain their own sanity.
6. Teachers want reasonable class sizes that are conducive to effective remedial instruction.
7. Teachers understand that remedial readers frequently have behavioral problems; however, their behaviors can't interfere with other students' rights to learn. Administrators have to buy-in to this condition and support teacher judgment.
8. To summarize, teachers want to be free to teach their students, not a program, *per se*. Teachers want their students to see direct benefit and pay-off in each lesson and learn quickly in what social psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, termed their "zone of proximal development." If teachers get what they want in their Remedial Reading Teacher's Manifest, they will achieve their goal to help their students become fluent readers who understand what they read.